

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 7942

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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SHUM, PN
SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS ACTION PLAN

REF: A. PANAMA A-130 B. STATE 261596

THE EMBASSY OFFERS THE FOLLOWING SUGGESTIONS ON THE DRAFT
ACTION PLAN FOR PANAMA CONTAINED IN REFTEL:

A. WE BELIEVE THAT THE REPORT MAKES TOO LITTLE OF THE
REMARKABLE FLOWERING OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION WHICH OCCURRED
IN SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER IN THE CONTEXT OF THE TREATY PLEBI-
SCITE. FOR EXAMPLE, IT IS NOT SUFFICIENT TO SAY, AS THE
DRAFT REPORT DOES IN PARA 2(A) THAT "BEGINNING IN JUNE 1977,
CRITICISM OF THE PROPOSED CANAL TREATIES BEGAN TO APPEAR
FREQUENTLY IN THE PRESS." WE RECOMMEND IN PLACE OF THAT
SENTENCE SOMETHING ALONG THE FOLLOWING LINES: "FOR ROUGHLY
A MONTH PRIOR TO THE OCTOBER 23 PLEBISCITE ON THE CANAL
TREATIES, PANAMA ENJOYED VIRTUALLY UNTRAMMELED FREEDOM OF
EXPRESSION. PUBLIC MEETINGS WERE FREELY HELD; THE PRESS,
RADIO AND TELEVISION WERE FILLED WITH THE VIEWS OF
TREATY OPPONENTS OF DIFFERING PERSUASIONS. DAILY
THERE WAS A BARRAGE OF CRITICISM OF THE GOVERNMENT,
NOT ONLY ON THE TREATY, BUT AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT'S
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POLICY ON EXILES, ITS ECONOMIC MEASURES, THE ABSENCE
OR INADEQUACIES OF POLITICAL FREEDOMS, AND EVEN THE
LEGITIMACY OF THE TORRIJOS REGIME. IT REMAINS TO BE
SEEN HOW MUCH OF THIS FREEDOM WILL CONTINUE."

B. ACCORDINGLY, THE SECOND SENTENCE OF PARA 2(A)
MIGHT BE ALTERED BY PUTTING A COMMA AFTER "PERMIT"

AND ADDING "EXCEPT AS NOTED BELOW."

C. THE SECOND ON THE NACR IN PARA 2(C) APPEARS MISLEADING ON ONE POINT. WHEN THE REPORT STATES "ON ITEMS OF COMMUNITY AND MUNICIPALITY CONCERN, IT (NACR) HAS SUCCEEDED IN ITS PURPOSE", IT GIVES THE IMPRESSION THAT THE NACR AS A BODY DEALS AFFIRMATIVELY AT THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT LEVEL WITH LOCAL QUESTIONS. WE SUGGEST DELETING THE SUB-PARAGRAPH BEGINNING "THE NACR WAS STRUCTURED" AND ENDING "VIRTUALLY NIL." AND SUBSTITUTING THE FOLLOWING: "THE REPRESENTATIVES ELECTED TO SERVE ON THE NACR ALSO SERVE ON REPRESENTATIVE BODIES AT THE COMMUNITY AND PROVINCIAL LEVELS. THIS SYSTEM HAS RESULTED IN GREATER GRASS-ROOTS PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC LIFE ON MATTERS OF LOCAL IMPORT AND AT THE LOCAL LEVEL. BUT THE INFLUENCE OF THE NACR AS A BODY ON ISSUES OF NATIONAL DOMESTIC POLICY, FOREIGN POLICY AND PARTICULARLY THE CANAL IS VIRTUALLY NIL."

D. THE SUB-PARAGRAPH ON POLITICAL PARTIES IS SOMEWHAT DATED BY RECENT EVENTS. WE SUGGEST STRIKING THE SENTENCE "OTHERS ORGANIZE INFORMALLY AS 'MOVEMENTS'." AND SUBSTITUTE THE FOLLOWING: "SEVERAL OTHER POLITICAL PARTIES CAME FORWARD TO PARTICIPATE IN THE CANAL TREATY DEBATE. THEY HELD PUBLIC MEETINGS; AND AT LEAST ONE CONFIDENTIAL

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PARTY, THE LIBERALS, GAVE ITS VIEWS ON A PRIME-TIME TELEVISION BROADCAST. THE PARTIES ARE TENTATIVELY PLANNING TO PARTICIPATE IN THE 1978 NACR ELECTIONS, BUT IT IS UNCLEAR WHETHER THE GOVERNMENT WILL ALLOW THEM TO DO SO."

E. PARA 3(B) OF REFTTEL CONCERNING CORRUPTION PROBABLY NEEDS ELABORATION. WE SUGGEST THE FOLLOWING FIRST SENTENCE: "MANY PANAMANIAN BELIEVE, PROBABLY CORRECTLY, THAT SOME PROMINENT GOVERNMENT AND NATIONAL GUARD FIGURES ARE CORRUPT. HOWEVER,....." REMAINDER OF STATEMENT TO BE RETAINED.

F. AT THE END OF PARA 4, WE WOULD STRIKE THE WORDS "OF THESE MEASURES" AND SUBSTITUTE "MEASURES TAKEN IN THE LAST FIVE YEARS." A CASE CAN BE MADE THAT THERE WAS A SECURITY JUSTIFICATION FOR SOME ACTIONS TAKEN BY THE PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT BETWEEN 1968 AND 1972 WHICH HAVE BEEN INTERPRETED AS HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS.
JORDEN

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